

History Lesson: St. Pat's Ball

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To the Editor:

As an interested engineer and a participant in Engineering Open House, I would like to clear up a point made in the March 5 issue of The Daily Illini. An article in that issue on St. Pat's Ball leaves the reader with the impression that the tradition of having St. Patrick as a patron saint for engineers originated on this campus. Although this tradition does have a long history here, it can be traced back further to the engineers at the University of Missouri.

The idea of having a patron saint for engineers came about in March 1903 as an excuse for a holiday. Some engineering students, especially tired of school and desperately in need of a vacation, decided to declare St. Patrick the patron saint of engineers and his day, March 17, as an engineer's holiday. Their reasoning was that because he engineered the project of getting the snakes out of Ireland he was an engineer and it was only fitting that his birthday be a holiday for engineers.

True to their word, on the appointed day all engineers cut classes despite contrary warnings from the university administration. The success of the stunt encouraged them to plan in advance for the next year. Thus with each succeeding year, the festivities grew and became more accepted with the result that it is now a tradition which has spread to many other campuses including the U. of I.

What started out as an excuse for cutting classes at the University of Missouri has now become the annual Engineering Open House Weekend. St. Pat's Ball, as part of this peculiar tradition, has a uniqueness which characterizes few University social events. Based on the idea of letting off steam, it still has this air about it which makes it different from other dances of the year.

Kenneth Dee